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E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [IS KMDR MEDIA REACTION REPORT](#)
SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

- [1](#)1. Mideast
- [1](#)2. U.S.-Israel Relations

Key stories in the media:

Israel Radio reported that last night the IDF entered the Khan Yunis refugee camp, from which it had pulled out three days ago, in order to neutralize mortars and Qassam rocket launchers. The IDF killed an armed Palestinian in the camp. The station reported that the operation is expected to last for two days.

All media, except Ha'aretz, led with events related to the planned disengagement from the Gaza Strip. Jerusalem Post and other media say that the opponents of the disengagement plan sharpened battle lines Tuesday when dozens of settlers donned orange Star of David badges. The media reported that right-wing MKs were among those who condemned the badge campaign. Maariv quoted right-wing activists as saying that 2,500 IDF soldiers, including several hundred in regular service, have signed a petition in which they pledge refusal to serve orders to evacuate settlers. Leading media quoted IDF Chief of Staff Moshe Ya'alon as saying before the Knesset's Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee that he is worried by the radicalization of statements by settlers.

Ha'aretz (Zeev Schiff) reported that the U.S. is demanding that Israel not send back to China some of the drones sent here for upgrading. The UAVs are already Chinese property. The newspaper reported that the Israelis were astonished, considering there is no American technology in the drones. However, Ha'aretz quoted American sources as saying that Israel will have no choice but to comply with the U.S. demand. The newspaper says that the "powerful" pro-Taiwan lobby is warning that advanced Israeli weapons technologies could be used against U.S. soldiers defending the island state off the coast from China.

The electronic media reported that Sharon met with British PM Tony Blair this morning in Jerusalem, and that Blair is expected to meet toady with other Israeli leaders and with the PA leadership. Reviewing the joint Sharon-Blair news conference, in which Blair said that disengagement should lead to the implementation of the road map, Ayala Hasson of Israel TV said there was a total alignment of U.S., British and Israeli positions regarding the issue of terrorism in the region. Sharon said at the conference that an end to terrorism would "change the situation in the region." He added: "The road map offers a solution to both sides, but ending terror is prerequisite." All media reported that Blair arrived in Israel last night after a surprise visit to Baghdad. Jerusalem Post and Israel Radio reported that Israel has allowed 1,000 Palestinian policemen to carry pistols in order to maintain order during local elections in the PA, which are scheduled for Thursday in 26 Palestinian municipalities in the West Bank. Ha'aretz cited the concern of the Fatah leadership that it may lose ground to Hamas in those elections

All media reported that a woman was stabbed to death Tuesday in Moshav Nehusha, south of Beit Shemesh. The media cited the police's belief that the murderer infiltrated Israel from the West Bank and acted out of nationalist motives. All media cited a Shin Bet

announcement that it has arrested Muhammad Abu-Gweed, a Syria-born Palestinian who has resided in the West Bank during the past few years, on suspicion that he was a Hizbullah agent. Abu-Gweed had lived in Iraq, where he took part in battles against U.S. forces. He is suspected of planning attacks on Israeli trains. Maariv reported that around 15 Palestinians wanted by Israel have returned to the "Mugata" in Ramallah.

Israel Radio reported that the Justice Ministry has asked President Moshe Katsav to pardon 37 Palestinian prisoners who are included in a list of 170 detainees to be freed -- likely by Monday. The release of the others is within the powers of the Defense Ministry and senior IDF officers.

Israel Radio reported that Trade Minister Ehud Olmert will meet with King Abdullah II of Jordan in Amman on Thursday.

Ha'aretz reported that on the first anniversary of the signing of the Geneva Accord, an advertising campaign is being aired on the Palestinian Qalqilya Channel-TV and five other TV channels, featuring Israeli and Palestinian statesmen voicing their support for the venture. The newspaper quoted Qalqilya Channel-TV director Tariq Jabara as saying that while a similar campaign elicited violent reactions in the PA a few months ago, the current promotion "does not go beyond the bounds of ordinary debate."

Jerusalem Post and other media reported that Wissam Tayem, who was allegedly forced by an IDF soldier to play a tune on his violin at a West Bank roadblock six weeks ago, was invited by the Keshet Eilon Music Center in the Galilee to participate in a three-day master violin class that brings together Jewish and Arab musicians.

All media reported that Tuesday the Labor Party's Central Committee approved the coalition agreement, and that it will name its choice of five ministers Thursday out of 13 candidates. Leading media reported that the passage of legislation allowing a second deputy PM could postpone the establishment of the new government by three weeks.

Ha'aretz and Jerusalem Post reported that Tuesday a majority of the Knesset's Constitution, Law and Justice Committee expressed their opposition to the possibility that the bill calling for compensation for settlers evacuated during the planned disengagement in 2005 will also include penalties for refusal to abide by it. Yediot reported that government officials have promised compensation to some settlers, even if the disengagement plan is eventually not implemented.

Leading media quoted visiting Italian FM Gianfranco Fini as saying as saying Tuesday that Italian paramilitary police will begin training Palestinian security forces in the coming weeks. He was quoted as saying in an interview with Jerusalem Post that Italy should justify Israel's case to the EU, and that reports of growing internal dissent in Israel will only give European leaders a greater appreciation of what Sharon is trying to do.

Hatzofe quoted a high-ranking Israeli security official as saying that the Palestinians have recently begun to manufacture rocket propelled grenades of the kind that once were manufactured by the USSR.

Maariv reported that Yoel Hasson, a Likud activist who also serves in Sharon's bureau, has announced, in a letter to thousands of Young Likud members, his intention to place moles at Peace Now, in order to investigate the movement. Peace Now D-G Yariv Oppenheimer demanded that Sharon fire Hasson immediately.

Ha'aretz reported that the interrogation of four AIPAC senior officials, which was to take place this week, has been postponed until after the New Year holiday.

Ha'aretz reported that UNESCO is initiating a project for Israeli and Palestinian journalists: the Israelis will learn Arabic at the Western Galilee College, while the Palestinians will learn Hebrew at Bir Zeit University. The courses, which will be almost entirely funded by UNESCO, will start in January.

Yediot and Maariv cited stories in The New York Times and The Washington Post, based on FBI memoranda, as saying that U.S. interrogators in Guantanamo Bay had wrapped an Iraqi prisoner in the Israeli flag.

Yediot reported that over 30 young Israelis have been arrested in the U.S. in recent days over illegal

peddling and breaking the terms of their entry visas. The arrests were made in the Minneapolis and San Francisco areas, as well as in Texas and Florida.

All media reported on, and Ha'aretz underscored, Tuesday's mortar attack on a mess tent in a U.S. military base in Mosul, Iraq, where hundreds of U.S. troops were lunching, in which at least 24 people were killed and 60 other were wounded.

A Mina Zemach (Dahaf Institute) poll conducted among settlers (Yediot's leading story):
-"Do you support the call by the Yesha Council of Jewish settlements in the territories for breaking the law?" Support: 47 percent; (55 percent among Gaza settlers); opposed: 40 percent (29 percent among Gaza settlers); 13 percent are undecided (16 percent among Gaza settlers).
-"How will you behave if an evacuation is decided upon and policemen come to your house to evacuate you?" "I'll barricade myself in my home and will refuse to be evacuated, without applying physical violence": 42 percent (44 percent among Gaza settlers); "I'll let myself be evacuated without resisting": 38 percent (23 percent among Gaza settlers); "I'll resist, using physical violence": 10 percent (11 percent among Gaza settlers); 10 percent are undecided (22 percent among Gaza settlers).
-"How do you believe the settlers in the territories will behave during the evacuation?" "They will barricade themselves in their homes and refuse to be evacuated, without applying physical violence": 45 percent (46 percent among Gaza settlers); "They will resist, using physical violence": 27 percent (22 percent among Gaza settlers); "They will let themselves be evacuated without resisting": 11 percent (6 percent among Gaza settlers); 16 percent are undecided (27 percent among Gaza settlers).

Ha'aretz cited a poll commissioned by Peace Now and conducted by Market Watch: 63 percent of Israelis are opposed to violations of the law that might be carried out in the process of disengagement; 20 percent favor such breaches; 17 percent are undecided.

1. Mideast:

Summary:

Liberal columnist Gideon Samet wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "The only way to put the settler leadership to the test ... is to start the actual evacuation, without any more blather, without turning weak-kneed."

Chief Economic Editor and senior columnist Sever Plotker wrote in the editorial of mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "A Middle Eastern 'Marshall Plan' of sorts ... is feasible only if it is led by the United States and if it is executed in cooperation with Israel. But its foundation has to be Palestinian."

Block Quotes:

1I. "Two Forces Move Into the Fray"

Liberal columnist Gideon Samet wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (December 22): "During a nerve-racking waiting period, a few facts are becoming evident. The main one is that the Prime Minister, in a series of well thought-out moves, has for the moment achieved most of his complicated goals. He's the knight of disengagement, but he manages to get along with his own unruly party.... Sharon the juggler is the key to the success or failure of the Gaza evacuation initiative. The settler picture is also becoming clear. They'll go all the way, and it could end up in bloodshed.... The possibility that the taut Yesha [i.e. settler] force ready for battle will manage to obstruct the disengagement cannot be taken lightly.... The only way to put the settler leadership to the test -- and the weight of the majority in favor of the exit from Gaza -- is to start the actual evacuation, without any more blather, without turning weak-kneed."

II. "The Palestinians' Test"

Chief Economic Editor and senior columnist Sever Plotker wrote in the editorial of mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (December 22): "The economic results of the Intifada for the Palestinians have been catastrophic.... The World Bank now assesses that

increasing the annual aid to the Palestinians in the coming few years to USD 1.4 billion annually.... A far greater investment will be needed to produce a real change in the Palestinian Authority.... of USD 15 billion in an international project that will center around settling ... 1.4 million Palestinians who are defined as 'refugees,' and who live in Judea, Samaria and Gaza [i.e. the territories]. An operation on that scale -- a Middle Eastern 'Marshall Plan' of sorts -- is feasible only if it is led by the United States and if it is executed in cooperation with Israel. But its foundation has to be Palestinian: the Palestinians themselves have to want this. And indeed they do want it; after a few decades' delay, they, we and the world are capable of ending, once and for all, the chapter of refugeeism in the life of the Palestinian nation. The death of Arafat, the planned elections in the Palestinian Authority, the democratic and liberal reforms that it has undertaken to implement, and the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza (and it is vital that it be carried out sooner than planned and completed by this coming Passover [late April]) create an historic opportunity to find an economic and human solution to the refugee problem in the natural and only possible place there is: in the territory of the future state of Palestine."

12. U.S.-Israel Relations:

Summary:

Senior columnist and chief defense commentator Zeev Schiff wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "Israel walked into the problem of a severe clash -- and not for the first time -- with many members of Congress who maintain an anti-China line.... A key question that cannot be ignored is why such misunderstandings repeatedly come up between Israel and the U.S. regarding China."

Foreign News Editor Arik Bachar "addressed the U.S." in popular, pluralist Maariv: "Who better than you knows that a flag is a sensitive thing, that is for looking at only."

Block Quotes:

1I. "Selling Arms to China, Or Not"

Senior columnist and chief defense commentator Zeev Schiff wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (December 22): "The Israeli-American crisis over the sale of an advanced technology weapons system to China has also turned into an Israeli-Chinese crisis in the wake of an American demand that Israel not return to the Chinese the Harpy assault drone that China recently acquired and which it sent back to Israel for an upgrade.... The problem is that Israel walked into the problem of a severe clash -- and not for the first time -- with many members of Congress who maintain an anti-China line. In recent weeks there have been hysterical reports in the U.S. about Israeli advanced technology sales to China.... A key question that cannot be ignored is why such misunderstandings repeatedly come up between Israel and the U.S. regarding China.... It is impossible [for Israel] to win with the argument that Taiwan is trying to drive a wedge between Israel and the U.S.; or that we told the Americans that they apparently did not understand the Israeli English; or that it is all a matter of jealousy in the arms industry, as if it were a matter of citrus exports. And there's too much counting on friends in Washington to get us out of every problem."

II. "Dear Uncle Sam"

Foreign News Editor Arik Bachar "addressed the U.S." in popular, pluralist Maariv (December 22): "You know that the Geneva Convention forbids torturing prisoners, and that in the culture in my neighborhood, wrapping an Arab up in the Israeli flag [as was reportedly done by U.S. military officials in Iraq and in Guantanamo Bay prison] is as inhuman an act as tossing a pig's body on a suicide bomber as he is making his way to a better and far more sensual world than ours. Because who better than you knows that a flag is a sensitive thing, that is for looking at only. After all, it is in

America that the entire nation rears up on its hindquarters -- or at least runs to the Supreme Court - - every time someone dares to desecrate the stars and stripes. Every June you have your 'Flag Day,' and it was less than four years ago, before the current outburst of patriotism that brought bin Laden to your land, that your administration proposed amending the constitution so that any American who burned your pretty flag could be sent to prison. So let's make sure we understand one another on this matter: from now on, let's leave ... flags out of it."

KURTZER